DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 620 RC 014 737

AUTHOR Faas, Larry A.
TITLE American Indian Degree Holders Who Return to Their Home Communities to Teach.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Education; *American Indians; *Community Attitudes; Community Leaders; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Parent Attitudes; Preservice Teacher Education; Student Attitudes; *Student Teacher Relationship; *Teacher Education Programs; *Teacher Influence; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Arizona State University

ABSTRACT

The 4-year Arizona State University Career Opportunities Project, designed to provide Arizona Indians with Bachelor's degrees so they could be employed as teachers in their home communities, graduated 34 teachers, 24 of whom were interviewed. Over half reported a period following their graduation in 1974 when they were closely watched by parents of their students and other community members. Relationships between program graduates and other school employees were generally excellent, with a few negative reactions. Although tribal leaders viewed the program as a major breakthrough, community members in several cases reacted with skepticism. Some participants were sustained in the program by encouragement from their parents; others reported that a relative was openly hostile or jealous following their graduation. Reactions from students were positive, after they became convinced that it was possible for an Indian to be a teacher. The test of time has proven that these teachers, who were regarded by members of their communities as "smart" when they graduated, are now also regarded as "wise," and are regularly sought out by parents and other community members for advice on educational matters. (MH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED243620

American Indian Degree Holders Who Return To Their Home Communities To Teach

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Larry A. Faas

College of Education

Arizona State University

1984

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Larry Faas

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

RC014737

American Indian Degree Holders Who Return

To Their Home Communities To Teach

Over thirty of the participants in the Career Opportunities Project for Indians at Arizona State University returned to their home communities as certified teachers after receiving Bachelor's degrees on August 8, 1974. Their employment in positions that had traditionally been held by non-Indians was accompanied by questions about how they would be accepted by other school employees, community members, the students, and their own relatives.

The Career Opportunities Project lasted four academic years and five summers. It was designed to prepare Arizona Indians for employment as teachers in their home communities. They lived and worked as teacher aides in their home communities during each of the academic years. University faculty members traveled to these communities each week to teach courses that the participants needed to complete their degrees.

The following report is based on indepth interviews with twenty-four of the project graduates. These interviews were conducted during their seventh and eighth year of employment as certified teachers.

A Period of Being Watched

Over half of the Indian teachers felt there was a period following their graduation when they were closely watched by the parents of their students and other community members. This period is reported to have lasted from a few months to as long as four years. Several stated that this period seemed to last longer for them than it did for newly employed non-Indian teachers.

Younger graduates and those who found that it was necessary to move to new communities following their graduation, were more likely to feel "watched" than long-time community members who were old enough to have some gray hair.

Those Indian teachers who were aggressive in introducing new ideas during the first year or two, were more likely to feel watched than those who kept a low profile. Speaking in one's native language while visiting with older community members, and continuing to live in harmony with local tribal customs, were thought to be helpful in reducing the length of the observation period.

Relationships With Other School Employees

The relationships between program graduates and other school employees was excellent in most cases. One graduate was informed by an administrator that she was employed because of "Indian preference". A few of the Indian teachers reported that other teachers said they resented the fact that the graduates had received financial support while they were working on their degrees.

The Teacher's Lounge behavior of some of the non-Indian teachers, and "school politics" were identified as problem areas by many of the Indian teachers. Criticism of students by name and discussion of teachers who were not present, was described as Teacher's Lounge behaviors that were particularly offensive.

Reactions of Community Members

The graduation and certification of thirty-four members of the Arizona Indian community was viewed by tribal leaders as a major breakthrough. Some community members congratulated the participants at the time of their graduation. Most of them made no comment.

A few made remarks suggesting they felt the graduates' programs of study had been "watered down" and that they were not really qualified to teach. Several of the graduates returned to campus during the Summer of 1975 to begin Master's degree programs. Those from one community reported that rumors were circulated at that time which suggested these Master's degree candidates had to return to college "to learn how to teach". A few parents asked to have their children assigned to other teachers. The graduates felt this was done at first because the parents were not sure about their competency as teachers.

One male graduate told about going to the home of close friends for a parent-teacher conference. He reported that this conference was held with the parent standing in the doorway while he stood outside. His role change apparently suggested that their relationship had also changed.

Reaction of Relatives

Several participants stated that encouragement from their parents, and the hope that their continuation would encourage their own children to do the same, kept them from dropping out when the going got tough.

A few of the teachers reported that a relative was openly hostile or jealous following their graduation. In two cases the husbands of graduates experienced difficulty when they realized that their wives were better educated and had higher incomes than they did.

Student Reactions

The presence of Indian teachers in the schools has provided students with role models who demonstrate that community members can achieve academically and perform successfully as teachers.

The students in one classroom thought the program graduate was teasing them when she announced on the first day of school that she was their new teacher. They responded, "No, you're a teacher aide. Teachers are Anglos!"

It took several moments for her to convince this primary class that she really was going to be their teacher. She reported that she will always remember how the children's faces lit up when they realized an Indian was really going to be their teacher. She said "Just thinking of the look on their faces makes me want to go all out for them".

Summary

Graduates of the Career Opportunities Project at Arizona State University have proven that it is possible for American Indians to return and perform successfully as certified teachers in their home communities. Many found that receipt of a Bachelor's degree and employment as a certified teacher was followed by a period during which they were watched closely by other community members. The test of time has proven that these teachers who were regarded by the members of their communities as "smart" when they graduated, are now also regarded as "wise". They are now sought out regularly by parents and other community members for advice and counsel regarding educational matters.

Larry A. Faas is a Professor in the College of Education at Arizona State University, Dr. Faas received his degrees from Iowa State University, The University of Northern Colorado, and Utah State University.